
PART ONE
Contexts

Women and Education

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Introduction

When 'education' (of whomsoever) is discussed, first thoughts centre on what is to be taught, on the content of education, and then on the methods of teaching deemed appropriate to that content. The discussion may then move on to consider who should be the teachers, who the taught, when this education should take place and where. It is only when these at first sight eminently practical questions have been adumbrated and discussion is under way that we become aware that certain assumptions have been made as to whether this education should take place at all, and if so for what purposes – purposes which on occasion are taken to be so self-evidently agreed by all as not to require expression, least of all discussion. It becomes critical, therefore, to include in any description and discussion of the education of girls and women in early modern England (or any other group at any other time) – i.e. the what? the how? the by whom? the for whom? the where? the when? – an 'ought' variable, which recognizes at the same time that 'prescription' concerns itself not only with what should be the case in the future but also with what is seen to be the best of current and past practice, just as the flood of 'now-a-daies' complaint referred to the worst of such practice. Authors of prescriptive literature in the matter of education had to feel that their prescriptions were in some sense reasonable, not plucked out of some ideal world, incapable of being realized.

Anne Murray, who was born in 1623, recollected in her autobiographical memoirs that her widowed mother

spared no expense in educating all her children . . . and paid masters for teaching my sister and me to write, speak French, play on the lute and virginalls, and dance, and kept a gentlewoman to teach us all kinds of needlework . . . but my mother's greatest care [was to ensure] that from even our infancy we were instructed never to neglect to begin and end the day in prayer and orderly every morning to read the Bible and ever to keep the church as often as there was occasion. (Loftis 1979: 10)

Reflecting on this, it becomes clear that it describes only part of a much wider picture, one which will require an inclusive rather than an exclusive use of the term 'education', and more particularly an avoidance of the equating of 'education' with 'schooling', if by that is meant what is transacted in the formal institution called 'school'. That other educative agency, the church, long pre-dated the school, and Osbert Sitwell's observation that he was 'educated during the vacations from Eton' reminds us that the family, pre-dating both church and school, continues to have a role in 'education'. Moreover, in the early modern period, John Milton expressed his own awareness that 'whatever thing we hear or see, sitting, walking, travelling or conversing, may fitly be called our book, and is of the same effect as writings are' (*Areopagitica*, 1644).

Plenty has been written about the 'learned ladies' of the past, but remarkably little about how far and in what ways they acquired their learning, and, equally important, whether and how they passed on their learning to their children. That some women in the early modern period were 'learned', 'educated' in the achievement sense, is not difficult to demonstrate, as the essays in Part Two of this volume will show. Precisely how they came to acquire that learning and the skill to express it is rather more difficult, and more so if we widen our enquiry to encompass the many as well as the few.

For our purpose here we shall distinguish between the few and the many by reference to their levels of literacy, at the same time noting the relatively greater importance of reading literacy, as contrasted with the ability to write (too often equated by historians with an ability to sign one's name at a particular time in a particular situation). By the turn of the sixteenth century most women in the upper and middle classes were able to read and write in a functional way. The vast majority of women, however, were quite illiterate in both senses. Their education, in our inclusive sense, was therefore based on their aural willingness to make use of an oral provision. Provided mainly in church and family, it was a provision which was directed, of course, to all classes of the population, and was primarily religious in content. It was in the parish church that literate and illiterate alike would, through the lessons of the Book of Common Prayer, become acquainted with the contents of the Bible, the readings being planned to cover the text of the Old Testament in the course of a year and that of the New Testament twice a year. In addition, the choosing of a biblical text and its explication was a function of the sermon preached by the parish priest or his curate. Despite the invention of movable type and the spread of the printed book, pamphlet and broadsheet, early modern England remained for a very large majority of women (and men) an essentially oral culture, and it was for this reason that Latimer reminded his congregation of Paul's words to the Romans: 'We cannot be saved without faith, and faith cometh from hearing the Word' (*Sermons*, ed. G. B. Corrie 1844: 200), and later, in his characteristic way, that John Donne reminded his that 'the ears are the acqueducts of the waters of life' (*Sermons*, ed. E. M. Simpson and G. R. Potter, 1953: V, 55).

In the early modern period it was well known that women constituted the larger part of the parish church's congregation, a fact attributed by contemporaries to their apparently 'natural piety'. There were, needless to say, plenty of men who found it desirable to attend more than one sermon in the week, but it was to women of like mind that the pejorative label 'gadders' was applied, as John Wing, for example, reported in his *The Crown Conjugall or The Spouse Royall* (1620):

Nay (says many an impious and profane wretch) if she be a churchgoer, a gadder after sermons, let her go, I will have none of her. I cannot endure these precise dames who are all for religion and never well busied but are poring over their Bibles.

Oliver Heywood recalled with pride that his mother Alice

hath in her time taken intolerable pains to hear sermons; scarce any public exercise, stated or occasional within many miles, but that she went to it; she was, as it were, the centre of news for knowing the time and place of weekday sermons. (J. H. Turner, ed., *Autobiography, Diaries* . . . 1883: I, 48)

Lucy Apsley, who was born in 1620, and who later married Colonel John Hutchinson, remembered that by the time she was four she was carried to sermons, and 'whilst I was very young could remember and repeat sermons exactly, and being caressed, the love of praise made me attend more heedfully' (Sutherland 1973: 288).

Reinforcement has ever been an essential part of education, and was never more enjoined and practised than with respect to the sermon. John Donne was repeating a common homely metaphor when he likened repetition – repeating the sermon to oneself or to one's family – to chewing the cud: 'The holy rumination, the daily consideration of his Christianity, is a good character of a Christian . . . all good resolutions . . . must pass a rumination, a chewing of the cud, a second examination' (*Sermons* IV, 36; VI, 52; VII, 327–9). In the 1590s Margaret Hoby noted in her diary, almost as a matter of course, that she 'talked with some of the house of the sermon'; 'after dinner I conferred of the sermon with the gentlewomen that were with me'; 'kept company with my friends talking somewhat of the sermon' (Moody 1998: *passim*). The preacher of Lady Anne Waller's funeral sermon reported in 1662 that

Her custom was after the sermon both in the morning and the afternoon to retire to her chamber and call before her her maidservants and such boys as served in the house to give an account of what they had heard, helping their memories and wherein they failed clearing up the sense of what was delivered . . . exhorting and pressing them to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. (E. Calamy, *The Happiness of Those Who Sleep in Jesus*, 1662: 28)

In some cases attendance and repetition were further reinforced by the practice of taking notes either at the sermon itself or later at home. Margaret Hoby constantly

wrote up her notes when she returned home. Before she married Robert Harley in 1623, Brilliana Conway kept a commonplace book in which she kept notes of sermons she had heard (Eales 1990: 48–9). John Barlow, who preached Lady Mary Strode's funeral sermon in 1619, reported that

She was a notary and took down sermons which she heard by her own hand . . . She did this when as many much meaner than she come with their fans and feathers, whereas (me seems) goose quill would far better befit their fingers . . . Moreover, having taken her notes she did in her chamber repeat to her maidservants the sermons she had heard and penned. (*The True Guide to Glory*, 1619: 48)

In this way, then, the religious education of girls and women of all classes, begun in the church, was continued in the household, to be supplemented by prayers and psalm-singing. Moreover, in his *Book of Martyrs* John Foxe recorded that Bible-reading was undertaken in the households of the less affluent families. Foxe's book itself, especially in Timothy Bright's abridged version, was popular family reading throughout the early modern period, being recommended for that purpose in Thomas Salter's *Mirrhor Mete for all Mothers, Matrones and Maidens* (1579), by Philip Stubbes in his *Anatomic of Abuses* (1583), as well as in Thomas White's *Little Book for Little Children* (1674) and Benjamin Keach's *Instructions for Children* (1693). Margaret Hoby read it to members of her household, and Elizabeth Walker included it in her 'prudent choice of books of instruction and devotion' which she drew up for the benefit of her two daughters, Margaret and Elizabeth (Charlton 1999: 216–19).

It has to be remembered that religious education such as this was taking place in the context of a Protestant state church concerned to ensure the continuance of itself and its crowned head. The maintenance of orthodoxy, uniformity and conformity became the overriding concern of those in authority. Religious education, therefore, was suffused with a political education which entailed an induction not only into religious observance and doctrine, but also into the power structure of society, with obedience, deference and subordination receiving particular attention. It was not for nothing that there was an 'authorized' Bible (whether the Great Bible of 1539, or the Bishops's Bible of 1569 or eventually the Authorized Version, 'King James's Bible', of 1611), a Book of Common Prayer in which figured prayers for the sovereign and his or her ministers, and an authorized catechism which glossed the fifth commandment to include not only 'thy father and thy mother' but also 'my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters, [and] to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters . . . to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me'. Glosses on the fifth commandment in the form of sermon or commentary poured from the presses in increasing numbers. Yet whatever form of control was used – statute, royal proclamation, episcopal injunction, authorized Bible, Book of Common Prayer, catechism – the early modern state was relatively powerless to enforce attendance at church, to control what was said in the pulpit, and above all to

monitor what religious and political education was engaged in inside the family. The result, therefore, was an extremely heterodox outcome, even within a godly family. Even in the matter of choice of marriage partner young women (and men) were enjoined in marriage sermons, 'Advices' and conduct books to marry only with the advice and consent of parents, with biblical proof-texts to substantiate the argument. A similar procedure was followed in the prescriptive literature about the suckling of infants (Charlton 1999: 29ff., 198–9). For some young women it was simply a Christian duty to follow such advice, though of course there were others, parents and children, who did not. Henry Parker alluded to the matter in his discussion of the relative rights of subjects and princes:

In matrimony there is something divine . . . but is this any ground to infer that there is no humane consent or concurrence in it? Does the divine institution of marriage take away freedom of choice before, or conclude either party under an absolute degree of subjection after the solemnization? (*Jus Populi*, 1644: 4–5)

As always, social and moral codes were susceptible to interpretation by individuals, and therefore productive of a variety of prescription, attitude and behaviour.

This was nowhere more noticeable than in the constant reminders to girls and women alike that the virtuous woman should be 'chaste, silent and obedient', both before and after marriage. The prayer designed for wives which was included in the Edwardian Primer of 1552 was repetitively typical:

Give me grace, I most entirely beseech thee, to walk worthy of my vocation, to know ledge my husband to be my head, to learn thy blessed word of him, to reverence him, to obey him, to please him, to be ruled by him, peaceably and quietly to live with him. (*Two Liturgies AD 1549 and AD 1552*, ed. J. Ketley, 1844: 465)

But even in the prescriptive literature this was not the whole story. Ambiguous familial metaphors and analogies, and innumerable glosses frequently hedged injunction round with conditional clauses in an attempt to reconcile patriarchy with affectionate mutuality in marriage (Goldberg 1986). Some wives were willing to accept a subordinate position in the matter of decision-making. In 1632 Lady Mary Peyton, for example, advised her daughter, newly married to Henry Oxinden of Barham, 'withal to be careful that whatsoever you do to love, honour and obey your husband in all things that it is fitting for a reasonable creature', and in so doing to 'show yourself a virtuous wife whose price is not to be valued' (*The Oxinden Letters 1609–42*, ed. D. Gardiner, 1933: 97). Elizabeth Walker's advice to her daughters Margaret and Elizabeth could not have been more customary, citing Proverbs 12.4 and 31.7 as well as 1 Peter 3.1–6. Lucy Hutchinson was her own witness:

Never man had a greater passion for a woman, nor a more honourable esteeme of a wife; yet he was not uxurious, nor remitted not that just rule which it was her honor to obey,

but manag'd the reines of government with such prudence and affection that she who would not delight in such an honorable and advantageable subjection must have wanted a reasonable soul. (Sutherland 1973: 10)

Yet for a variety of reasons other women did not subscribe to such 'advantageable subjection'. Anne Askew, for example, left her husband of an arranged marriage when (as John Bale reported): 'In the process of time by oft reading the sacred Bible, she clearly fell from the old superstitions of papistry to a perfect belief in Jesus Christ . . . whereupon she thought herself free from that uncomely kind of cloaked marriage by this doctrine of St Paul, I Cor.6' (*Select Works of John Bale*, ed. H. Christmas, 1849: 199). Foxe celebrated the lives of other women contemporary with Askew, who held fast to their reformed religion in the face of 'unbelieving' husbands. Other women expressed their wish for a degree of independence by ignoring the customary injunction to marry only with the advice of friends and parents. Anne More, daughter of Sir George More of Loseley near Guildford, resorted to secrecy in her marriage with John Donne (R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life*, 1970: 128–90). Elizabeth Freke followed a similar path in 1671 when she married her cousin Percy Freke (M. Carbery, *Mrs Elizabeth Freke, Her Diary, 1671–1714*, 1931: 148). There were many others of like mind.

In the Household of Another

Most of the education we have touched on so far took place either in the home of the upper and middle levels of society, or, with the rest of society (at least those who attended), in the church – of whichever denomination, for in the religious education of girls and women there was remarkably little difference between the various religious groupings. However, following the medieval tradition of sending boys and girls to spend their childhood in another, preferably socially superior, household, many parents of high social standing sent their daughters to join another family where they would be expected to receive the kind of education considered appropriate to their class. It is important to recognize that this was but one method of socialization amongst several for such girls. The plurality of method was itself expressed in the public–private debate in education then current, a debate which recognized the reductiveness of the view that sending children away to this kind of education stemmed simply from a lack of affection on the part of parents. As always in such cases, motivation varied from one family to the next and, as the records of individual families show, was in some cases mixed.

Nicholas Orme has used the domestic correspondence of the mid- and late-fifteenth century to show this practice at work (*From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of English Kings and Aristocracy 1066–1530*, 1984). The letters which passed between Arthur Plantagenet and his second wife Honor Basset, in the early sixteenth century, tell a similar story of the placing of their daughters, Bridget and Elizabeth Plantagenet and Catherine, Anne and Mary Basset. In Sir Thomas More's house we find

Anne Cresacre, Francis Staverton and Margaret Giggs. Catherine Hastings, wife of the 'puritan Earl' Henry, third Earl of Huntingdon, had in her household Margaret Dakins, later Lady Margaret Hoby, whose first husband was Walter Devereux, who, with his sisters Penelope and Dorothy, was also a resident member. In a postscript to a letter to Sir Julius Caesar in 1618, Lady Catherine quite justifiably claimed 'I think there will be none make question but I know how to breed and govern young gentlewomen', and as part of the 'breeding' process this deeply religious woman doubtless made it plain to her charges that she 'governed' in accordance with the fifth commandment (C. Cross, *The Puritan Earl*, 1966: 24–7, 57). On occasion, of course, a pious upbringing was not the only or indeed the prime reason for sending a daughter to another's household. Sir Edward Molineux, for example, sent his two daughters to the house of his cousin, to be brought up, as he said, 'in virtue, good manners and learning, to play the gentlewoman and good housewife, to dress meat and oversee their households'. Henry Thorndike was more tersely direct in sending his niece to live with the Isham family in Northamptonshire 'that she might find match by having the honour of being in your house' (Pollock 1989: 236).

The greatest household to which a girl could be sent was the royal court, an old chivalric tradition by which both girls and boys were sent to learn the appropriate mode of service to their elders, as well as to acquire courtly manners and to participate in the religious pattern of the royal household (Charlton 1999: 131–2). The practice continued virtually unchanged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and nowhere more so than in the pious ambience of the court of Henry VIII's queen Catherine of Aragon. It was to this place that in 1517 Catherine Parr's newly widowed mother Maud went as a 21-year-old lady-in-waiting to the queen, accompanied by her three young children, Catherine aged three, Anne aged two and the infant son William, there to be joined eventually by the young Princess Mary, with whom they were brought up alongside Katherine Willoughby and Joan Guildford, daughters of Catherine's other ladies-in-waiting. The court of Queen Elizabeth was also used as a 'school' for numerous other 'maids of honour'. In 1575, when she was 13, Mary Sidney, daughter of Sir Henry and Lady Mary Sidney and sister of Philip, was sent to Elizabeth's court where she became a lady-in-waiting, as had her mother before her. The household of Queen Henrietta Maria was of quite different religious orientation, but it was there that Margaret Lucas, later Duchess of Newcastle, was sent, following her mistress on the outbreak of war first to Oxford and then to France. Elizabeth Livingstone (later Delaval) was also at court aged 18, serving in the Privy Chamber of Queen Catherine, wife of Charles II.

Academies for the Daughters of Gentlemen

It was during the seventeenth century, however, that a new kind of provision became popular, the 'academies for the daughters of gentlemen' (Charlton 1999: 131–41), thus widening the debate as to whether boys should be educated at home by a private

tutor or sent away to the increasing number of grammar schools which took in boarders. When John Batchiler printed his *The Virgins Pattern* in 1661, in which he memorialized 'the life and death of Mistress Susanna Perwich', he dedicated it 'To all the young ladies and gentlewomen of the several schools in and about the City of London and elsewhere'. His reason for doing so arises from the fact that Susanna was the daughter of Robert Perwich who had a school in Hackney, in which she finished her education and had then become a teacher. Hackney was at the time a salubrious suburban village to the north of the City of London, in which many prosperous middle- and upper-class people had taken residence, and in which were to be found several schools of a similar kind and clientele. One of the earliest to be mentioned was that run by a Mrs Winch, which became known in 1637 as a result of a notorious and well-reported abduction (Fraser 1984: 23–5). It was in the following year that the 8-year-old Katherine Fowler arrived in Hackney to attend the school of a Mrs Salmon; Fowler would later marry and, as Katherine Philips, make her name as a poet, 'the Matchless Orinda'. The two eldest daughters of Sir John Bramston were also sent to Mrs Salmon's academy on the death of their mother in 1648, and in his notebook Samuel Sainthill of Bradninch, north of Exeter in Devon, recorded his outgoings for the teaching and boarding there of his sister during the three years 1651–3. Mary Aubrey, a cousin of the antiquary, also attended the school, and in 1675 Ralph Josselin's two daughters Mary and Elizabeth arrived with their mother from Earls Colne in Essex.

The Hackney schools were plainly well supported over the years by the prosperous parents of young ladies, but no records of the schools themselves have survived. Similar schools were started in the villages which circled London in the seventeenth century. Evidence of such schools in the provinces is scattered and equally lacking in detail other than that of their existence. All that is known of the schooling of Margaret and Mary Kytson, daughters of Sir Thomas and Lady Elizabeth Kytson of Hengrave Hall in Suffolk, is derived from an account book entry which recorded expenditure 'For a drinking at Thetford and the children going to school at Norwich' in January 1573, Norwich lying about 30 miles to the east of their home.

Elementary Schools

It was in the seventeenth century, too, that a new kind of provision, an endowed elementary school, was made available for the children of the poor (Charlton 1999: 142–53). The early Protestant reformers had emphasized the need for all believers to learn to read (at least the Bible), 'so that they may better learn to believe, how to pray and how to live to God's pleasure', as the 1536 Royal Injunction put it. Thomas Becon called for the setting up of a nationwide system of schooling in his *New Catechisme* (1559), and such a comprehensive system continued to be called for, especially during

the Commonwealth period. William Dell, for example, stipulated that 'in the villages no women be permitted to teach little children but such as are most sober and grave' (which suggests that women were already active in such a role), and that 'in these schools they first teach them to read in their native tongue, which they speak without teaching, and then presently as they understand, bring them to read the Holy Scriptures' (Dell, *The Right Reformation of Learning*, 1646, in *Several Sermons and Discourses of William Dell*, 1709: 643).

It was left to the task of philanthropy to attempt to provide funds for this level of education, the bulk of the evidence being found in wills, wherein the rents from donated lands or the interest from a capital sum were indicated to be put to the provision of education for the children of those 'sorts' of parents usually labelled 'poor', 'humble', 'labouring'. Unfortunately, most such testaments provide only the barest of detail – a sum of money or parcel of land, with the number and 'sort' of children to be provided for, as in the will (1562) of William Pepyn of Wenhaston in Suffolk, who left £20 to educate poor children of the village in 'learning, godliness and virtue'. Some benefactors provided a little more detail. In 1586, for example, George Whately of Stratford-upon-Avon granted lands in Henley and other parts of Warwickshire, half the rents of which were to provide for a master to teach 30 children reading, writing and arithmetic in Henley-in-Arden. Anthony Walker, Rector of Fyfield in Essex, left by his will of 1687 (he died in 1692) houses and land to teach the poor children of Fyfield to read, write and cast accounts, and to say their catechism. The sum of £1 was allocated for the purchase of books and paper for the poorest children, plus £1 for Bibles.

Other benefactors were more generous. In 1611, for example, Marmaduke Longdale of Dowthorpe Hall, Skirlaugh in Yorkshire left £200 for a school. In 1634 William Smyth left £250 to purchase lands whose rents were to be used for a master to teach 'all youth rich and poor, female and male' who had been born in West Chilton in Sussex. Laurence Bathurst's 1651 bequest of £150 was for the poor of the parish of Staplehurst in Kent to be taught reading and writing, together with 'instruction in their duty to God and man', an initiative which was supplemented in 1655 by a subscription which raised the sum of £40. Some few will-makers were concerned to direct their bequests to the education of girls only, though examples of this occur only towards the end of the century, as in the 1683 will of Batholomew Hickling. Part of the monies accruing from the rent of lands was to be spent on the purchase of Bibles to be distributed to the children in the area round Loughborough. The rest was to be used to found a school for 20 poor girls from the town, with a mistress who would be paid £4 per annum to

teach and instruct said girls in learning the English alphabet of letters and the true spelling and reading of the English tongue, in good manner and behaviour, and also in the grounds and principles of Christian religion. (B. E. Elliott, *History of Loughborough College School*, 1971: 12)

For the vast majority of these schools for the poor we have no evidence of their subsequent history. Some, however, became subsumed under eighteenth-century charity school provision, and surfaced later as elementary schools in the nineteenth century. Some few survived, in different guises, even later, as in the case of the Loughborough school and that founded in the village of Madeley in Staffordshire by the will of Sir John Offley (1645) (Charlton 1999: 150–2).

The evidence for the elementary education of girls is scattered and usually lacking in detail, and in almost every case lacking (as with the academies) any serial documentation such as is available for the male-only establishments, the grammar schools and universities. Even so, it is clear that at this educational and social level, schooling was provided by both men and women founders for girls to be taught by both masters and mistresses, sometimes alongside boys and sometimes on their own, and that the overriding aim of such education was a religious one – the fostering of a God-fearing and deferential clientele.

Accomplishments

Religious and political education were undoubtedly considered to be the most important part of the education of the younger generation – female and male – but not the whole. Young women of the upper and middle classes were expected, in addition, to acquire what were considered to be the social graces or ‘accomplishments’, much as Anne Murray had reported in her memoirs. Margaret Lucas, Lucy Apsley and Anne Harrison reported in similar vein.

As in the cases of these young ladies, music was a common feature in what might be called the upper-class curriculum, though none of them in their reports gives any detail as to who taught them to read music or play an instrument. The same was true of Margaret Hoby who recorded in her diary for 26 January 1600 that she ‘played and sung to the alpherion [a stringed instrument] to refresh myself being dull’ (Moody 1988: 56). Lady Mary Wroth, daughter of Sir Robert and Lady Barbara Sidney, niece of Philip and Mary, was brought up in a musical family. Her father was the dedicatee of Robert Jones’s *First Booke of Songes or Ayres* (1600) and Robert Dowland’s *A Musically Banquet* (1610), whilst Mary herself was the dedicatee of Jones’s *The Muses Gardin of Delight* (1610). In her portrait painted after her marriage to Sir Robert Wroth, she is shown standing with an archlute (a base lute with an extended, unfretted peg-box), which, if it was meant to have actual rather than symbolic significance, would certainly have required some form of tuition. Even so, no record of music tutors appears in the family papers. In her autobiography Alice Thornton, who was born in 1627, reported that among her other accomplishments her mother, Alice, was taught the ‘Harpicalls and lute’, and that she herself received tuition in the lute and theorbo (a double-necked lute), this alongside a detailed religious education (Surtees Society, 62, 1875: 8). Nicholas Ferrar’s nieces at Little Gidding found time from their

extensive religious exercises to engage in lute playing (T. T. Carter, *Nicholas Ferrar: His Household and Friends*, 1892: 125). The madrigalist Henry Lawes was tutor to Alice and Mary Egerton, daughters of John, Earl of Bridgewater, and dedicatees of Lawes's *Book of Ayres and Dialogues* (1653) (I. Spink, *Henry Lawes: Cavalier Song Writer*, 2000: 5, 12). Sir Edward Dering recorded in his household book for 1 June 1649: 'Paid Mr Lawes a months teaching of my wife £1 10s', Lady Mary being the dedicatee of Lawes's *Second Booke of Ayres and Dialogues* (1655) (E. Rimbault, *Notes and Queries*, 1st Ser. 1859–60: 162). The extended Kytson family of Hengrave Hall were similarly involved with musicians (Lawes, John Dowland and Henry Wilbye) who, whilst in residence at the Hall, taught the children and dedicated their works to various members (Woodfill 1953: 252ff.). The household accounts of Sir William Petre of Ingatestone Hall, Essex, have numerous entries relating to the purchase and repair of musical instruments, as well as to visits by William Byrd and to resident musicians Richard Mico and John Oker. From 1558 to 1560 a Mr 'Persey' was paid 'for teaching the gentlewomen to play on the virginalls', presumably including the daughters of the household, Dorothy, Elizabeth, Thomasine and Catherine.

It should be noted that music (as well as dancing) was not universally deemed suitable for young girls and women; in the opinion of some, such as Thomas Salter in his *Mirrhor Mete for all Matrones* (1579) and Thomas Powell in his *Tom of All Trades* (1621), it encouraged lasciviousness and other vices. Those who approved of it, on the other hand, regarded it as the epitome of harmony, as well as providing opportunity for acceptable recreation, and as Margaret Hoby found, a remedy against 'dullness'. Some found it a useful mark of marriageableness, whilst others argued that for too many this was its only justification, taking up time which would be better spent reading godly books and meditating on one's ultimate end.

During the sixteenth century some families, notably those of Thomas More, Edward Seymour and Anthony Cooke, engaged their daughters in the study of Latin and Greek. By the turn of the century, however, such a practice was going out of fashion, and in any case, it was argued, had been rendered unnecessary due to a good deal of classical literature being available in translation. In the seventeenth century modern languages, and particularly French, had become part of the curriculum for young gentlewomen, though only because it was considered fashionable to converse in French, since translators were also making romances in French available in English (Charlton 1965: 109, 208–9, 227–34).

The 'accomplishment' which was universally accepted as an integral part of a young woman's education was housewifery. Manuals on cookery, needlework, medicine and midwifery, directly addressed to women, frequently appeared in print throughout the period. For the majority of girls such skills would be learned at the elbow of their mothers, by observation as much as by precept, in the certain knowledge that they themselves would be called upon to exercise these skills in their own households. At the same time, they would be constantly enjoined in church that it was their godly duty – their 'vocation' – to 'husband' the resources which had been gathered in by

their 'better half' outside of the home. Even among the more affluent, we find an acceptance of the prescribed division of labour. Margaret Hoby's diary, for example, gives a detailed account of a woman of some substance 'busy in the kitchen . . . busy about the reckonings . . . busy preserving . . . busy in my garden all the day almost . . . all the day setting corn' and so on. Sir John Oglander acknowledged his indebtedness to his wife Frances, who 'was up every day before me, and oversaw all the out-houses; she would not trust her maids with directions, but would wet her shoes to see it done herself' (C. A. Oglander, *Nunwell Symphony*, 1945: 39). Sir Hugh Cholmley reported in similar vein about his wife Elizabeth, who 'went round her whole domain from hop-garth to hen-yard, from linen closet to larder' (Cholmley, *Memoirs*, 1870: 30). Plainly these were not simply pragmatic arrangements to meet exceptional circumstances, but in the minds of some a more reflective enactment of that principle of mutuality for which biblical texts provided a justification. For others, an informed oversight of servants was simply a matter of housekeeping economics or a reinforcement of social hierarchy.

Women as Agents

Thus far we have considered girls and women as recipients of education provided by others, usually men. The question now has to be asked how far and in what ways did women act as agents in their own and others' education. Women's diaries provide first-hand evidence of books women actually read. Anne Venn, daughter of the regicide Colonel John Venn, kept a diary 'written in her own hand and found in her closet after her death,' in which she noted:

I got a book called Mr Rogers Evidences and another called The Touchstone of True Grace and another called None But Christ and divers others . . . read Mr Dod upon the Commandments . . . a little book called the Marrow of Modern Divinity . . . reading some sermons of Mr Marshalls and others . . . one of Mr Burrowes books and fifty sermons of Mr Knights . . . opened Mr Burroughs book which I read many daily hours together. (Venn, *A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning*, 1658: *passim*)

In the diary of Elianor Stockton (Dr Williams' Library, Modern Ms. 24.8, fols. 20–2) is found a record of 'short sentences that I have met with in my reading', including 'Caryl on Job 30.2 . . . The Christians Daily Wake . . . The Spirits Office Towards Believers . . . Mr Crow on the Lord's Supper . . . that small piece of Mr Flavell's entitled A Token for Mourners'. The reading of Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, included Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, the sermons and writings of Jeremy Taylor, the poems of George Herbert and Richard Baxter's *Crucifying of the World by the Cross of Christ*, her favourite book (Charlton 1999: 180–7). Lady Catherine Gell was a regular correspondent of Richard Baxter, and confessed to him in one of her letters 'many a time

I goe about my house among my servants when I had rather locke myself in a roome alone amongst my books. For meditation I never knew it my duty till I had read your *Saints Rest*, and then setting on it I found it very hard' (Keeble and Nuttall 1991, I: 249). Meditation in the privacy of their own closet was a further practice which enabled women to educate their minds and their emotions, Baxter's *Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650 and many editions) being one of the most popular among many expositions of the practice (Charlton 1999: 171–7).

Mary Rich was not the only reader of George Herbert's religious poetry, which was published posthumously in 1633 as *The Temple. Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*. Susanna Howard, Countess of Suffolk, died in 1649. In the funeral sermon preached by Edward Rainbowe, Bishop of Carlisle, he referred to her reading of

divine poetry, in which kind she took excessive delight to be conversant in Mr Herbert's *Temple*, in which she found out such fit and significant elegancies that when she read or repeated them it was hard to determine whether the author or she made the sense, such innumerable descants would she make upon every single expression there. . . . Begin a religious ode of Mr Herbert's which she had read and she would ordinarily repeat the rest without sticking or missing'. (*A Sermon Preached at the Interring . . . of Susanna, Countess of Suffolk . . .*, 1649: 12–13)

Lady Mary Wharton died in 1674. In her funeral sermon reference was made to her wide reading of godly authors, including 'Mr Herbert's verses which she could repeat without book' (P. Watkinson, *Mary's Choice . . .*, 1674: 34). Mary Rich produced for George, Earl of Berkeley, at his request, a set of 'Rules for Holy Living', in which she urged him to 'remember that Mr Herbert in his excellent poem says "Game [i.e. gaming] is a civil gunpowder in peace / Blowing up houses with their whole increase"' (*Church Porch*, stanza 34) (C. Fell Smith, *Mary Rich Countess of Warwick*, 1901: 184). Berkeley himself (mis)quotes (from heart presumably) stanza 55 of the poem in his *Historical Applications and Occasional Meditations* (1666: 17), adding a couplet of his own which has distinct echoes of the opening stanza of Herbert's 'Constancie'.

Of course, women read other literature than godly books. If she could read at all, it seems, Sir Thomas Overbury's 'Chambermaid' would read romances: 'she reads Greene's works over and over, but is so carried away with the *Mirroure of Knighthood* that she is many times resolved to run out of herself and become a Ladie Errant' (*Characters*, 1614; in *The Overburian Characters*, ed. W. J. Paylor, Oxford, 1936: 43). But the chambermaid's mistress, too, was not averse to such reading. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, complained

The truth is, the chief study of our sex is romances, wherein reading, they fall in love with the feigned carpet-knights with whom their thoughts secretly commit adultery, and in their conversation and manner, or forms or phrases of speech, they imitate Romancy Ladies. (*Sociable Letters*, 1664: 39)

Mary Rich acknowledged that until she was married (1641) she spent her 'precious time in nothing else but reading romances and in reading and seeing plays' (T. C. Croker, ed., *Autobiography of Mary Countess of Warwick*, 1848: 21). Lady Elizabeth Delaval blamed her governess for encouraging her in such reading matter, concluding, when she came to write her memoirs, 'Thus vainly passed the blossom time of my life which should have been spent in laying a good foundation of what is to be learned in such books as teach us heavenly wisdom' (Surtees Society, 190, 1978: 32). Two kinds of 'romance' are being referred to here, one which might be termed the 'chivalric' romance and which included works such as *Morte d'Arthure*, *Amadis de Gaule*, *The Mirrour of Knighthood* and the long-popular tales of Robin Hood, the other being the new generation of romance, originating in France in the mid-seventeenth century and quickly being translated into English – the 'Cassander, the Great Cyrus, Cleopatra and Astrea' which Elizabeth Delaval had read. It should be said that men, too, read these works, Francis Kirkman, for example, who later translated part of *Amadis* and other romances, recollecting with pleasure his reading of them in his youth, when he 'wished myself squire to one of these knights'. John Milton, Richard Baxter and John Bunyan were not alone in regretting the time they 'wasted' in reading such literature (Charlton 1987: 467–9). Its existence, and the constant stream of criticism directed towards it and its authors, should serve to remind us that 'education' took place as much outside the classroom as in it, and it is, at the very least, a moot point (then as now) as to which kind of education, formal or informal, is the more influential in the upbringing or 'formation' (in the French sense of the term) of young and adult alike. As Sir Philip Sidney acknowledged in his *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595):

Truely, I have known men, that even with reading *Amadis de Gaule* (which God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect poesie) have found their harts moved to the exercise of courtesie, liberalitie and especially courage. (Sig. E4 verso, F1 recto)

The same was true of the theatre-going public (as also, in the sixteenth century at least, of the open-air performing of the mystery plays), when the cathartic effect of vicarious humour and bawdy as well as adultery, murder and illicit passion, gave the wider audience a sense of sharing a range of basic emotions not only with their peers but also with their 'betters'.

If women were active in the process of self-education, so too did they contribute in no small measure as agents in the education of others. A first contribution to the education of those who could read only their native tongue would be the translations that women made of works in foreign languages. An early example would be Margaret Beaufort's translation of Book II of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi*, which was published in 1504, and Margaret Roper's *Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (1525), which she translated from the Latin of Erasmus. As well as translating the French of Du Plessis Mornay and Robert Garnier and the Italian of Petrarch, Lady Mary Sidney completed her brother Philip's translation of the *Psalmes of David* from the Latin of

the Vulgate. Ann (Prowse) Lok (or Locke) published her *Markes of the Children of God and Their Comforts in Afflictions* from the French of Jean Taffin in 1590, by which time she had married her second husband, Edward Dering. In her Epistle Dedicatorie she gave a detailed account of her purpose in the undertaking:

First to admonish some . . . that they learne to applie unto themselves whatsoever they hear or reade of the triall of God his children. . . . Secondlie, to awake others abound-
ing both in knowledge and other graces who notwithstanding Satan . . . hath so rockt
asleepe that they seem almost . . . to have forgotten both themselves, their holy calling
and profession. Last of all to comfort another sorte, whom it hath pleased God so to
press down with sorrowes they can scarce receive the words of any comfort.

Elizabeth Cary, the Catholic Lady Falkland, was briefer but equally forthright when, in her translation *The Reply of the Most Illustrious Cardinal Perron to the Answere of the Most Excellent King of Great Britaine, the First Tome* (1630), she insisted

I will not make use of that worn-out form of saying, I printed it against my will, moved
by the importunity of friends; I was moved to it by my belief that it might make those
English that understand not French, whereof there are many, even in our universities,
read Perron. (*To the Reader*, sig. A2 verso)

– and, of course, to consider his religious arguments. When Margaret Tyler translated from the Spanish her *Mirroure of Princely Deedes and Knighthood* in 1578, on the other hand, she was more concerned to justify her intrusion into what was considered to be a male preserve.

By far the most important part played by women as agents in the education of others in the early modern period was their contribution to the education of their own children, which I have dealt with at length elsewhere (Charlton 1999: ch. 7). We have already noted here a kind of surrogate mothering in the practice of sending girls away from home to live with another family. When Bridget Plantagenet was sent, aged about 7, to the household of Sir Anthony and Lady Jane Windsor, Sir Anthony wrote to her father in 1538: ‘she is very spare and hath need of cherishing, and she shall lack nothing in learning or otherwise that my wife can do for her’ (M. Saint Clare Byrne, ed., *The Lisle Letters*, 1981: V, 219–20). Despite the stereotypical picture of the all-powerful husband and often possibly harsh patriarch, there was in the early modern period a common acceptance of the prime role of the mother as an agent in the education of her children, a role which continued well beyond the period of early infancy.

In the family setting direct attention was paid to the view that ‘religious education’ consisted not simply of ‘religious knowledge’ – of the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed and the contents of the Bible – but also of everyday behaviour, the Christian virtues which were expressed in the multitude of conduct books

and 'Advices', and which were to be the immediate end-product of all public and private worship, prayer, reading and exhortation. Example, therefore, was considered to be a prime motivator in familial education. As R[oger] C[arr] put it, 'verbal instruction without example of good deedes is dead doctrine' (*A Godly Form of Householde Governement*, 1598: 260). William Gouge likewise insisted that 'Example is a real instruction and addeth a sharp edge to admonition' (*Of Domesticall Duties*, 1600: 542). Parents' example was thus crucial in the formation of their children, though that provided by their servants was almost always cited as something to be shunned. Grace Mildmay, for example, reported that she had been warned by her parents to avoid the serving men of the household, 'whose ribald talk and idle gestures and evil suggestions were dangerous to our chaste ears and eyes to hear and behold' (Pollock 1993: 46). Elizabeth Walker was quick to see the danger, her husband recalling that she would 'strictly charge the servants not to teach her children foolish stories or teach them idle songs, which might tincture their fancies with vain or hurtful imaginations' (A. Walker, *The Holy Life of Elizabeth Walker*, 1690: 90). As we have seen already, wives also paid attention to educating their servants in the Christian virtues (Charlton 1999: 234–7).

Of course, precept figured equally with example in mothers' efforts to educate their children. Advice books such as Dorothy Leigh's *The Mothers Blessing* (1616), Elizabeth Jocelin's *A Mothers Legacie to her Unborne Child* (1624) and Elizabeth Richardson's *A Ladies Legacy to her Daughters* (1645) figured largely in the advice literature of the period. When Lucy Hutchinson produced a more organized text in her *Principles of Christian Religion*, which she addressed to her newly married daughter Barbara, she started with a disclaimer:

You may perhaps, when you have read these common principles and grounds which I have collected for you, thinke that I might have spard my payns and sent you a twopennie catechize which contains the substance of all this.

But she was convinced that this would not suffice:

You will find it my duty [she continued] to exhort and admonish you according to the talent entrusted with me, and to watch over your soul, though now under another's authority . . . and advize you to exercise youre owne knowledge therein by instructing your children and servants. (5–7, 90–1; the text was not published until 1817)

In keeping with her last comment, her advice was thoroughly orthodox, as was that of Lady Anne Halkett in her *Instructions for Youth*, 'for the use of those young noble-men and gentlemen' whose education was committed to her. Letters from mothers to their children often included similar advice, alongside the usual news of family illness and good health and considerate enquiries about the health and behaviour of the recipient (Charlton 1999: 234–7).

Conclusion

Two final questions remain fundamental to any study of women writers and their work. First, how did they acquire the education which enabled them to engage in such an erudite activity? Second, who read their work and for what purpose, who benefited from reading it? These are questions not of production but of distribution and reception. Such questions are rarely asked, least of all in biographies and biographical chapters, and not surprisingly, since the evidence by which to answer them is rarely available. For example, how did Ann Lock acquire sufficient skill in French to be able to translate Jean Taffin's theological treatise? Or Margaret Tyler acquire skill in Spanish? Did they have a tutor or were they 'self-educated'? If the latter, what manuals did they use? Such manuals existed, but which particular one did they use? We know that Katherine Fowler Philips was educated at Mrs Salmon's academy in Hackney. It would be reasonable to suppose that she received an education similar to that of Susanna Perwich, which might have enabled her to undertake her translation of Corneille's *La Mort de Pompée. Tragédie* in 1663. But further than that we cannot go. We know that Margaret Roper received a classical education in the house of her father, Sir Thomas More, which presumably enabled her to translate Erasmus, but we have no precise details to reinforce the presumption. Damaris Masham was educated at home by her learned father, the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, but again we have no precise details to indicate how she became the woman who later was able to correspond with the Revd John Norris on matters theological, a correspondence which resulted in Norris's *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life . . .* (1690). Mary Astell's correspondence with Norris was also published by him as *Letters Concerning the Love of God Between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Rev John Norris* (1695). Before she left her native Newcastle-upon-Tyne for London in 1688 she was apparently tutored by her father's bachelor brother, Ralph Astell, who had been a pupil of Ralph Cudworth when the Cambridge Platonists were active in Cambridge, and had thus imbibed their views about the desirability of a rational consideration and justification of Christian faith, a view which we find in both the *Letters* and Astell's *Serious Proposal*, as well as her *Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church* (1705). Yet Astell's biographer has to rely on 'according to tradition' as her evidence for the tutoring (Perry 1986: 46).

To conclude, then, it has to be remembered that in the matter of education in the early modern period women were as much agents as recipients – recipients at home, in church and at school, agents of both prescription and provision in the education of others, including their own children. Yet, even for the affluent, for the most part the content of education was limited and limiting, with most of it provided by men, leading Mary Astell, even at the end of the period, to complain 'so partial are men as to expect bricks where they afford no straw' (*Serious Proposal*, 1696: 24). Whilst for the majority, both affluent and poor, education was a matter of conforming to the social

and cultural norms prescribed by those in authority, some few seized the opportunity to 'turn the world upside down', and to use their new-found ability, to read the Bible for instance, to challenge stereotypical views about the nature of masculinity and femininity and the purpose of 'nurture', well aware that, as Bathsua Makin put it, 'A learned woman is thought to be a comet, that bodes mischief whenever it appears' (*Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen*, 1673: A2 recto). Whilst those in authority looked for uniformity and conformity, the picture the historian finds is one of contradiction and doubt, a picture in other words of the untidiness of life. The history of women's education is not simply about women and girls, but about males and females and their inextricably bound interactions, and how these affected and were affected by conceptions such as virtue, obedience, citizenship and power, which could and often did produce behaviour and action very different from that intended.

See also RELIGION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMININE; AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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